

PROVIDENCE BULLETIN (RI)
5 October 1982

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Republicans monopolize forum stage

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PROVIDENCE — Rhode Island's three Republican congressional candidates — Sen. John H. Chafee, Rep. Claudine Schneider and Lincoln town administrator Burton Stallwood — had the stage to themselves last night when their three Democratic counterparts failed to show up for an open forum at St. Xavier's Academy on nuclear weapons and U.S. policies in Central America.

Although Mrs. Schneider's opponent, James Aukerman, attended the opening minutes of the forum, he never took the stage, telling a reporter he was going off to a meeting with members of a machinists' union. John McGrath, who was sent as a stand-in for Chafee's opponent, Julius C. Michaelson, was barred from speaking by the event's organizers, who clearly were miffed by the candidate's absence.

Despite the absence of the Democrats, the meeting, which was sponsored by a coalition of peace and social justice groups, had many elements of a debate, with Mrs. Schneider and Chafee taking opposite sides on such issues as military aid to El Salvador and the development of a neutron bomb.

Although Mrs. Schneider reiterated her view that military aid to El Salvador should be stopped, Chafee insisted that such a course would be a "mistake."

"The best way to end this slaughter (in El Salvador) is with the leverage we have in our aid," said Chafee, who said earlier in the evening that he did not believe either the U.S. government or any multinational corporations were responsible for injustices inflicted against Latin American poor. "I don't believe that ending our aid would guarantee an end to the slaughter. In fact I think it would accelerate the slaughter that exists."

To back his position, Chafee read a letter from William Doherty of the Americans for Free Labor Development. Although some of the members of the audience charged that Doherty had been identified as a CIA operative, Chafee said he knew nothing about that, and that to his knowledge the group was linked rather to the AFL-CIO.

Although Chafee did not appear to win any points with the predominantly liberal audience with his El Salvador position, he got applause when he declared that the United States "has

been overconcerned by communism."

"First of all, everyone against us isn't a Communist. And I don't think there is any danger of anyone from Honduras Invading the United States. If we lift our sights and stop worrying about Communism, we'll all be better off," he said.

The two Republican incumbents also clashed over the issue of the neutron bomb, with Mrs. Schneider vowing to continue her fight against it and Chafee insisting such weapons must be part of the U.S. arsenal, to be given up only if the Soviets agree to do the same as part of a negotiated arms reduction.

While all three candidates favored a mutual, verifiable freeze on nuclear weapons, they also reacted quite differently to a proposal that funds be allocated to planning for conversion of Electric Boat, the manufacturer of the Trident submarine, to more peaceful projects.

Chafee argued that such a conversion would be tantamount to unilateral disarmament by the United States.

But Mrs. Schneider told the audience that she and Chafee were of the view that such a conversion would be desirable, but only after an agreement on a freeze on nuclear weapons.